

The constant collection of data on Pokepatch and Paynes Crossing has created an ongoing need to develop innovative techniques to organize the information. In 2003, HBCU students organized a considerable amount of Paynes Crossing data into a Forest web site. The site includes site and project history, historic land plat maps, birth and death records, cemetery and funeral records, census data, and individual family summaries (see www.fs.usda.gov/wayne). The web site was developed in response to the public demand for detailed information on the Forest's research, and offers a quicker and more effective way to disseminate these results.



Collaboration over the last several years with Ohio University's Department of African American Studies has been utilizing students to organize archival collections and conduct oral history interviews of Paynes Crossing and Pokepatch family descendants.

The ongoing study and preservation of these resources helps the Forest fulfill its mission of "Caring for the Land and Serving People."



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**Wayne
National
Forest
2011**



**The Underground Railroad
on the
Wayne National Forest**

Background

For many years, the Wayne National Forest has been studying and preserving the vestiges of early African American history on its land in southeastern Ohio. The work has been accomplished through partnerships with the Friends of Freedom Society, the Multicultural Genealogical Center, and several Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCU). Research has focused on two early nineteenth century African American settlements - Paynes Crossing on the Athens Ranger District, and Pokepatch on the Iron-ton Ranger District. Both were formed by freed African Americans, whites, mulattoes, and Native Americans. Neither of them were "towns" per se, but each was rather a system of farmsteads spread out on a rural landscape. They existed primarily between the 1820s and 1880s. Both are now largely archaeological, with only a church and two cemeteries still standing.



Pokepatch



Union Baptist Church 1879

Pokepatch was a well-known "station" on the Underground Railroad (UR) and seemed to have been settled for the sole purpose of harboring fugitive slaves on their journey northward to freedom. After the Civil War when the Underground Railroad movement was no longer necessary, many of the Pokepatch families moved out. Preliminary research by the Forest Service has consisted of archival study, field reconnaissance, consultation with local historians and UR research groups, and informal conversations with several of the descendants. Examination of the Pokepatch area land records from 1827-1878 showed a considerable amount of iron furnace company ownership. This revelation helped to confirm that many of the iron furnace owners were not only known abolitionists, but actually subsidized the UR activities in the Hanging Rock Iron Region.

Vesuvius Iron Furnace 1833



Paynes Crossing

Paynes Crossing exhibits many similarities to Pokepatch and years of comparative research guided by UR historians now indicates that it probably also served as a "station". The Payne Cemetery (1852-1927) is the primary remnant of the settlement. The individuals buried in the



cemetery were freed from plantations in the Virginia territory in the early 1800s and five of the men enlisted in the Ohio Regiments of the U.S. Colored Troops and fought in the Civil War. The cemetery was restored and re-dedicated in 1995, and a historic marker was installed in 2010. Oral history interviews of living family descendants have been performed, and the entire Forest Service tract has been inventoried for archaeological resources.

